

THE
NATIONAL PREACHER.

Go... Teach all nations....Mat. xixii. 18.

No. 10.

NEW-YORK, MARCH, 1827.

VOL. I.

SERMON XIII.

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NEW-YORK.

THE DUTY OF FAMILY WORSHIP.

II. SAMUEL vi. 20.—Then David returned to bless his household.

In the life of this great and good man, though we find much to lament, yet we find more to admire and love. Any one who delights to survey the developement of human worth, must be pleased to follow him in his gradual rise from the shepherd's staff to the sceptre of empire.

At the period to which the text refers, his many troubles were gone, and he was the acknowledged king over both Judah and Israel. The surrounding nations, who had long and too successfully invaded the land, had been subdued once and again; so that his name was feared and respected abroad, as well as loved and venerated by his own people.

But, in the height of his renown, David did not forget that he was a husband and a father. On the day alluded to in the text, having blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts, we see him, at the proper season, retiring from the midst of admiring thousands to *bless his household*—He offered up prayer, as a husband and a father, in the midst of his family. With this illustrious example before us, our present object will be,

TO RECOMMEND AND ENFORCE THE DUTY OF FAMILY WORSHIP.

Perhaps there are few subjects that need to be treated with more plainness and tenderness than this. For not only your own welfare, but the welfare of your children and children's children through many generations, may be considered as intimately connected with your attention to this duty.

Let me observe at the commencement, however, that when I urge the duty of worshipping God in the family, I do not mean, simply, asking a blessing from Him at meals. I should be grieved and surprised to know that any one before me needs exhortation on this point:—that any one who even occasionally comes into God's house, should live in such open and avowed forgetfulness of God, as to sit down several times daily, at the table of His bounty, without once acknowledging the hand that feeds every living thing. But, brethren, if you know of any such, to guard you against their example, consider that the word of God respecting them is, “Let their table become a snare before them; and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap.” No: when I speak of the duty of worshipping

God in the family, I mean, *assembling them together, and as the first employment in the morning, and the last in the evening, unitedly reading a portion of God's word, and unitedly addressing His throne.* With this explanation, let me now invite your attention,

I. TO THE OBLIGATIONS enjoining this service;

II. TO THE ADVANTAGES resulting from it.

First; The obligations to family worship. There are certain duties of religion resulting so plainly from the relations we bear to each other, and to our Maker, that they are perhaps not made the subject of *express commandment*. But these duties are often among the most sober and essential parts of Christian obedience: and we find our warrant for them, and our obligation to them, in their manifest connexion with God's glory and our own welfare; in the richest promises of divine mercy; in the most fearful denunciations of divine wrath; and in Scripture examples, recorded with Heaven's approbation and praise. So is it with the duty of *Family Worship*. Of all associations, the first in importance, as well as first in time, is that of the family. In proportion as its relative duties are well discharged, Church and State are safe and prosperous. These duties never will be discharged without the instrumentality of household devotion. But by uniting in daily prayer, members of a family may be made to realize that they have a common Father and God, who is now their Witness, and will hereafter be their common Judge. Indeed so important has this been considered in every age, that the very Heathen themselves had their household Divinities—Gods, whom as families they worshipped, and to whom they daily looked for the blessings, which as families they needed. And if any parent living in a *Christian* land, and believing in the *true* God; and having children growing up around him, whom he has been instrumental in bringing into being, and whose being he *may* be instrumental in making a blessing or a curse to themselves and the world; if such a parent, I say, can habitually neglect the plain duty of leading his children in the worship of the one living and true God;—alas, the example is a most lamentable contrast to that of the Pagan, devoutly, though ignorantly, bowing with his family to an idol of wood or stone. Yes, brethren, the religion of nature, as well as the religion of the Bible, prompts to family worship. There is not a feeling which belongs to us as fathers, which does not plead for this duty:—There is not a relation which we sustain, either to children or servants, but it speaks out, and enjoins—let there be an altar to Heaven, at which the father and head of the family may minister, and call down blessings on those around him.

And while we find not only warrant, but arguments for this duty in every kind feeling of a father's heart, which even the darkness of paganism can not destroy; we at the same time find the Most High adverting to it in language that may well alarm such as have neglected the duty. Says the inspired Prophet, *Pour out thy fury upon the Heathen that know thee*

not, and upon the families that call not on thy name ; for they have eaten up Jacob and devoured him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.

If we advert to history, for examples, we find that in every age there have been wise and holy men, who have felt the importance of this duty, and acted accordingly. Of Abraham we have as God's own testimony, "I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment ; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." Of Moses, the head and lawgiver of Israel, it is said, "He was faithful in all his house as a servant, for the testimony of those things which were to be spoken after." Joshua declared his purpose, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." And Cornelius, the Roman centurion, was chosen to receive the vision which issued in breaking down the wall of partition between God and the Gentile world, with this account of his character and family, "One that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."

We might also advert to profane history, and mention the names of a Hale, a Walton, a Bacon, and others, famed afar for whatever is wise, and noble, and grand ; and yet men who could daily find time to retire from the service of their country, and the allurements of philosophy, and to join with their families, morning and evening, in the humble worship of God. Of such statesmen I could say, as did Sheba's queen, of Solomon, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom." How pure and blissful the reign of happiness around them ; for their dwellings are houses of prayer ! But, not to anticipate ourselves, let us next consider,

II. THE BENEFITS RESULTING FROM THE OBSERVANCE OF THIS DUTY.

Among these I might name that *peace of mind* to the head of the family himself, which is the natural consequence of rightly discharging this duty. There is a weight of responsibility, which every reflecting husband, father, and master, will feel deeply, when he considers himself the first and nearest earthly guardian of those around him ; and which must fill him with the consciousness, that the Divine guidance and blessing are daily needed by himself and them. Whether all or any of the children in whom his name and interests are to live, when he is gone, are to fall into wretchedness and disgrace, or to rise to happiness and honour, depends on Heaven's guidance. Whether all or any of them are to be swept into an untimely grave, depends on Heaven's care. God alone sees the end from the beginning ; and is able to avert every impending evil from them, and to turn them from every sin. And what parent has devoted his children to God, and daily united in commanding his family to Heaven's guidance and care, without feeling a peace of heart to spring from the duty, to which the unworshipping father must be a stranger ? Wherever business may call you, when you think of *home*, and of the dear immortals that dwell there, is it not an anchor of the soul, to be enabled to reflect, that on the morning when you left them, you committed them to the care of Him, whose eye is

in every place, and whose ear is open to every prayer? Or should you leave them unbiassed by devotion, and should sudden death or calamity come in among them; would there be no keen anguish added to the smart of Heaven's stroke, when you should reflect that you had not even asked for Heaven's protection? But the benefits of discharging this duty are not confined to the head of the family; they are calculated to affect the head and the members equally.

Family worship is an important *means of religious instruction*. A portion, though it be small, of God's word, read every day in the hearing of a family, will soon make them, in some measure, acquainted with the contents of the Bible. It is by doing a little, and doing it frequently, with seriousness, that our best acquirements are gained. And we may add, that this mode of gaining or giving religious knowledge, although in small portions, yet at frequent intervals, has the advantage of enabling us, if we will, to practice what we hear, and as we hear it. But further—

The discharge of this duty is one most effectual means of *promoting domestic union and peace*. Every family is happy and prosperous about in proportion as each member is disposed to study and act for the good of the whole. But, in almost every household, there are eyes that do not see, and hearts that do not feel alike: and even when wisdom and regularity have done their utmost, there are often little untoward events between parents and children, between masters and servants, that may mar the happiness of all, if they are not wisely controlled, by a spirit of mutual good-will and forbearance. And by no other means can this spirit of union and kindness be so effectually secured as by due attendance on the family altar. Under the influence of the holy flame which burns upon it, the heart has often been softened into a forgetfulness of those little irritations, that, if allowed to remain, would ripen into explosions, separating not only servant from master, and master from servant, but perhaps brother from brother, and parent from child. How must confidence in a parent or master—how must readiness to submit to his will and authority be produced and strengthened in a child or servant, when permitted to bow down with him and unite in supplicating mercies from one common Father and Master in heaven: and how must his heart be guarded against every disposition to oppression, or unkindness when he kneels, and acknowledges their common transgressions before God, and entreats a common forgiveness. It is impossible but that union and peace should be the result of such oft-repeated scenes; and he that will seek thus to consecrate his dwelling, as a temple of peace, will find it so; for the *God of peace will be with him*.

Family worship is also a grand means of *the growth of religion in the heart, and in the Church at large*. It is not so extensively true, that families are what the Church makes them, as that both Church and State are what families make them. Magistrates and ministers of religion were once children in a family; and what they are to be as magistrates and ministers, is often to be determined from what they have gathered from the parent to whose examples and precepts they may have at first looked. It is a most fatal mistake to imagine that the ordinances of the public sanctuary are

enough of themselves to train up children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The parent who is thus training them, will be sure to bring them to the sanctuary, that they may enjoy its ordinances.—But the seed lodged in the tender heart by the ministry of the sanctuary, must be watered and nurtured at home, or it will die; and what can water it so effectually as the father's prayers, offered up for all, in their immediate presence?

Religion is so essentially social in its nature, that if we are debarred, during the whole week, from those ordinances, in which heart may kindle heart, we experience a restlessness, and a decay, which the closet can not of itself remedy. Now it is between the devotions of the closet, and the public worship of the sanctuary, that God has ordained the worship of the family—in which all the ties of nature may unite to strengthen the principles of grace; and thus new strength be added daily to our love to God and to each other. And when I contemplate the spectacle of the master and the servant, the parent and the child, and perhaps too the aged grand-parent and the little prattlers, all bending reverently before the God of heaven to seek His favour; and when I know that this scene is repeated every morning before they scatter to the business of the day, and every evening before they retire to rest,—methinks there is something so holy and heavenly in all this, that it must exert a sanctifying influence on old and young who dwell in the happy family. Such a dwelling has in it the ark of the covenant: and *The Lord will bless it and all that pertain to it, because of the ark of the Lord.* The name of God is honoured there, and His blessing will there descend—a blessing on their basket and their store; a blessing on their bodies and their souls; and it shall last from generation to generation. They have the promise, "Our sons shall be as plants grown up in their youth; our daughters as corner stones polished after the similitude of a palace." Such an house stands near to Heaven: On its lintel and the posts of its doors, is the sprinkled blood of the slain lamb; and when angels of wrath are abroad in the land, they see the life-ensuring signal, and they pass by. Angels of light encompass that dwelling, when the darkness of night has covered it: and by night and by day, He who is the angels' Lord and our Brother is there, "the Watchful Shepherd that never slumbers nor sleeps." O that, for our city's sake, our Church's sake, our souls' sake, our children's sake, such a home might henceforth be the dwelling of every one here!

And now, brethren, we affectionately ask, why is this duty not faithfully performed by you all? What is your objection?—what your excuse?

I know I speak to some, who have found the worship of God in their families to be one of their most delightful employments; and who are no strangers to the benefits arising from it. But probably there are others present whose families have never been thus blessed. To such fathers and heads of families I would now make my appeal, and ask, *why is it so? what is your excuse?*

One very common plea is, *the want of ability, suitably and comfortably to discharge the duty.* To this I would reply, that every thing must have a beginning; and if we never attempt any thing, until we feel adequate to

do it well, life from beginning to end would be one unbroken scene of idleness. We never know what we can do, till we try—and especially in duties of religion. The great fault generally is, that we do not venture far enough. In every duty to which God's authority invites us, we have God's promise, that He himself will be our Helper, and will carry us through. And when His providence places you at the head of a family, and his authority calls you to worship Him in the midst of it; venture, trusting His promise to pour out upon you the spirit of grace and supplication; and your heart will be enlarged, and your mouth opened, as sure as there is power and grace in heaven. But, '*we can not trust.*' Ah! this is the secret of all the worst failings that ever overtake the Christian from the beginning to the end of his course on earth. And as I know some do feel this want of ability deeply and painfully, let me suggest to them a remedy, or means of help.

I am opposed to the use of forms in prayer when the individual can with comfort and enlargement address his Maker without them. But I am altogether in favour of using them, rather than that the individual should either not pray at all, or pray with such embarrassment and feebleness, as both to destroy his own comfort, and the edification and profit of those around him. Now you all know there are some excellent forms of prayer, prepared by holy men, adapted also for use in families. These, I would say, it is the duty of every one to use, who can not conduct family devotion profitably without them. And he who will begin in this way, and will aim to gain strength, by using the proper diligence to store his mind with divine promises and petitions, from God's word, will generally find himself, after a time, able to lay aside this aid, and to fulfil the duty, not only to his own joy, but to his own surprise. Most generally, the full heart will ultimately make the fluent tongue. But should a form, from whatever cause, be necessary to the last, let it be used to the last:—for "it is accepted according to that which a man hath, and not according to that which he hath not."—And, granting this aid to all who need it, is there a father before me, who can any longer plead the want of ability to worship God in his family, as an excuse for omitting the duty? Oh, how many have spent hours in reading to their families from the light publications of the day; who yet shrink from even reading a prayer in their presence!

By others *the want of time is urged.*—Their families are large—their business presses them—it is of such a nature that they can not control their hours. Thus they plead that they have not time for a duty, which they confess to be all-important. On this point permit me to remark, that good people do sometimes err, in spending more time in the performance of this service than is wise or dutiful. We may be so long, as to become tedious in our prayers; and whenever this is the case, it creates a weariness, especially in the minds of the young, that is too apt to end in disgust or aversion. But when we urge the duty of allowing no day, in ordinary circumstances, to pass by, without, as a family, spending ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes, in the solemn worship of our Maker; and when the objection made against it, is *the want of time*, we ask, Can men be serious, when they say so? It is not a little remarkable, that the illustrious men, whose names are on record

as most faithful in this duty, were occupied with callings, which might seem to furnish the best excuses for omitting it. Moses, bearing all the concerns of Israel's host, on their march from Egypt, yet found time to be "*faithful in all his house.*"—Joshua, a warrior, and, under his banner, leading Israel to the conquest of nation after nation, yet declares his purpose, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"—Or shall I name one of later day? A greater ornament of the bench, or a more laborious servant of his country, never sat as Judge, than was Sir Matthew Hale. And yet his family worship, morning and evening, was as regular as the rising and setting of the sun. And with the example of such men before us, who sustained the most important interests of States and nations,—shall we, whose duties scarce carry us beyond the immediate concerns of our own persons and families,—shall we say we have no time to worship God in our houses? Brethren, we shall never have time for any thing unless we choose to take it; and we all could find time for this duty, if we had correct views of its importance, and were really desirous of performing it. For, think but a moment of your plea. No time! Brethren, I ask in God's holy name, what becomes of your time? Spend all that your opportunities will allow you to spend in the pursuit of the world, and gather up its very fragments which you now throw to the winds, and you will have the time I ask for the worship of your Maker.—Save what you now spend in frivolous conversation, or in conversation worse than frivolous,—save what you now spend in unwise and intemperate reproof of your families; and spend that time, and that breath in praying for them and with them; and the sacred duty will be uniformly discharged.

Perhaps, I may be told by some, that they have a different hinderance—they feel the ability and they would make the trial; but *they are opposed in their own families; and to enforce attendance would create a discord, that might defeat the great object of the duty itself.* To this I reply, we do not know that it would create such discord, until we have tried it, and the duty is fairly introduced. And are we to omit the performance of a positive and important duty, because of an apprehended evil, the following of which is at most uncertain, and rather improbable; and at the worst far from a natural result of the duty itself? But, apart from this, God has made you the head of your family; and you are responsible to Him, for the rule of that family, in His fear. At the worst of peradventures then, you are bound to do your duty;—you are not to resign your rule, because some child of disobedience chooses to dispute it. And if in any thing, you would resolutely maintain it, you should do so in serving God. And even should opposition be ever so fixed; be you determined and persevering; and you will see that the most stout-hearted shall find that the arm of the Almighty is above them.

But in this I am supposing and granting one of the greatest of extremes. No—I cannot believe, that there is before me one father, who is cursed with children, so lost to every thing kind in the feelings of nature, so estranged from, and hostile to every thing good and pure in the worship of the true God—so fixed in the seat of the scorner—as either rudely, or obstinately to oppose the wishes of a parent to pray with and for them; to bring down

from Heaven upon them, the blessings that may enrich them through life, and in eternity. Rather let me hope better things of the young around me; and believe that they would feel the faithful performance of this duty, as a new claim upon them for filial obedience and gratitude.

And now let me for a moment entreat the young, who are yet under a parent's roof, where the family prayer is heard in its season, to reflect on the mercies that surround them, and the claims which lie upon them. Let no hour, no employment of your lives be accounted more precious than when you bend at the family altar. Come to it cheerfully and solemnly. Let no temptation of evening or morning make your place empty, when the holy offering is to be made. Be you there to add your coal to the flame, and have your share in the incense which goes up before God. Let the prayers of your parents, put up for you, be embalmed in your memory. They will be a cordial to your spirit, in the sad day when you shall turn away from their fresh grave, and think what a father and mother you have buried. And they will be a treasure and a defence to you through life; for, answered they will be, when God shall see most fit. Oh! of all the patrimonies that we should most desire, to make us happy here and hereafter—honoured among men, and beloved in heaven; it is the ardent and frequent prayer of a sainted father or mother, who, in childhood and youth, has led us to Heaven's mercy-seat, and there implored for us, and with us, Heaven's favour to our portion.

Parents and Heads of families, let me entreat you not only to perform this duty, but also to consider *how* you perform it. Let it be done in such a way, and with such a spirit, as will show that you value it. When you undertake it, let your worldly cares and concerns be so adjusted, your dwelling be so silent and peaceful, that but one sound shall be heard in it—the *sound of true devotion*. Let there be no temptations left to distract yourself, or others:—allow by your earnestness and devotedness, that your heart is in your work—that you feel yourself and your family to be before God, waiting for his hearing and his blessing. And when your worship is thus presented, see that your conduct throughout the day corresponds with it. Beware that no unholy deed or word should destroy the heavenly influence, which your devotion may have spread around you; and thus make your very duties rather a stumbling-block and a reproach to religion, than its aid and ornament.

Is there before me, the Head of a family who is yet young? let me entreat him to begin this duty *now*. The longer you defer it, the more are you in danger of never beginning; for the more will difficulties multiply. Or is there before me the Head of a family, who is in mature years, or old age, and whose house is not yet a house of prayer? let me say affectionately to such, you have not a moment to lose. *Begin this night.* Should your first attempt be no more than reading a portion of God's word, and bowing with your family merely to ask God's protection till the morning; *begin this night.* For to-morrow and to-morrow's night are not yours. To-morrow's dawn may find you in eternity, or on eternity's dread brink!

the world; and I have been very much interested in the cause of my beloved Master, and his cause has been a source of infinite interest to me.

SERMON XIV.

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THE UNION OF BELIEVERS WITH CHRIST.

JOHN xv. 5.—*I am the Vine, ye are the Branches.*

These words plainly express the fact, that humble believers are united to the Lord Jesus Christ. They were spoken by him to his disciples; and, through them, to his faithful followers in every subsequent age. To Him all true Christians are inseparably united. And, from this union, they derive their spiritual life, their growth in grace, their Christian character, and their title to all the blessings of the new covenant. My present object will be,

To illustrate this Union of Believers with Christ.

That our sentiments on this interesting subject may not be misapprehended, it may be proper to remark, that it is neither a union of essence, nor of person.

It is not a union of essence.

Of this character is the union of the three persons in the Godhead. The Scriptures teach us, that "there are Three that bear record in heaven,—the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are One." The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are, in one sense, three: and yet "these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." Mysterious and incomprehensible as this doctrine of the Trinity is, we are bound to receive it, because it is plainly and frequently taught in the Holy Scriptures.

Such can not be the union of Christ with his followers. This would exalt Christians to a state of equality with the infinite Saviour, and clothe them with the attributes of God: an idea too absurd—too blasphemous—to be indulged for a single moment.

It is not a union of person.

Of this character is the union of Divine and human nature in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is God, possessing the Divine nature, with all its distinguishing and incommunicable attributes. He is Man, possessing a human body and soul. These two natures constitute in him one person. He is, and will continue to be, "God and man in two distinct natures and one person for ever."

The union of believers with Christ is not of this kind. That would entirely and for ever destroy the individuality of Christians. It would make but one person of Christ and all his disciples among all nations and in all ages of the world. The absurdity of such a doctrine appears at the first glance. Merely to state it, is to refute it. The union of believers with Christ, then, is neither an essential nor a personal union.

Having made these remarks to prevent misapprehension, I would now proceed, in a plain Scriptural manner, to illustrate the real nature of this union.

1. In the text and context, the union of believers with Christ is compared to the union of the *branches with the vine*. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me, ye can do nothing." "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." As the branches are united to the vine, and in consequence of that union, receive vegetable life and nourishment; so Christians are united to the Lord Jesus Christ, in such a manner as to receive from him spiritual life and heavenly nourishment. He is the vine—the source, whence they obtain the sanctifying influences of Divine grace. By these influences they are enabled to bring forth the fruits of holiness in their life and conversation. In order to abound in the fruits of holiness, they must abide in Christ—they must live near to him; feel their unceasing dependence upon him; confide in his merits; and daily and devoutly implore new communications of his Spirit. As well may they expect fruit from the branches, when separated from the vine, as look for increase of grace in their own hearts, while departing from Christ. If they do not abide in him, they are like dead branches which can produce no fruit; and which are fit only to be gathered into bundles, and cast into the fire. But if they abide in Christ, they are like living and vigorous branches, and will be enabled to "bring forth much fruit."

2. In the Scriptures the union of believers with Christ is compared to the union of the various parts of *an edifice with the foundation* on which they securely rest.

"Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house." "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief-corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." As the different parts of a building are connected with each other, and all depend on the foundation for support and strength; so the different members of the Church are connected with each other, and all depend on Christ for spiritual strength. Resting on him as their firm foundation, they constitute a spiritual house, an habitation of God by his Spirit. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

3. The union of believers with Christ is compared to the union of the *human body with the head*.

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ; who is head over all things to the Church, which is his body." "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of

his bones." As the various members of the human body are united to the head—are under its influence—and partake of the same sustenance: so true believers are united to Christ as their head; are under the influence of his Spirit; are supported by rich communications of his grace; and are members of his mystical body.

4. This union is compared to that, which, by the marriage covenant, is constituted between *husband and wife*.

"The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh:—this is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." As the wife is, by the marriage covenant, united to her husband; so, in some respects, "they are no more two, but one flesh;" as they are interested in each other's affections, in each other's property, and in each other's reputation: so true believers, by the covenant of grace, are made one with Christ, the spiritual Bridegroom of the Church. By this union they become interested in his affections, in his glory, and in all the blessings of his kingdom.

5. The union of believers with Christ comprises *similarity of dispositions*.

The "same mind" is in Christians "which was in Christ Jesus." "With open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Paul said to the Romans, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit; if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." And again, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." If the same mind must be in us, that was in Christ Jesus; if we must behold the glory of the Lord, and be changed into his image from glory to glory, by the sanctifying influences of his Holy Spirit, in order to be Christians; if the spirit of Christ must dwell in us, and we must possess the same temper of love to God, and benevolence to men, which he possessed, or be none of his; then true Christians are united to Christ by similarity of disposition.

In Christ, *holiness* is the great principle of moral action. So is it, also, in Christians. This is evinced by the precious fruits of holiness which are visible in their conversation and conduct. To abandon the love and practice of sin; to exercise evangelical repentance; to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and to render sincere and persevering obedience to the commandments of God; are, evidently, effects of holiness. For "the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Sinners can not be brought to the exercise of genuine repentance for sin, living faith in Christ, and cordial

obedience to the commands of God, without holiness in their hearts. Their hearts must be renewed and made holy, or they will remain impenitent, unbelieving, and disobedient. Hence Christ said to Nicodemus, " Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God." And Paul taught, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, that, " without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Christians, then, are "born again." They are regenerated by the powerful operations of the Holy Ghost. They are made holy in heart and life. Their holiness is perfectly similar in its nature, though vastly inferior in degrees, to the holiness of Christ. Being conformed to the moral image of Christ; being holy, in some measure, as he is holy; and having his Spirit dwelling in them; they are actuated by the same principles, and, of course, are united to him in the disposition of their hearts.

6. The union of believers with Christ implies a *fraternal relation*. Christians are united to Christ by adoption of the Father.

By an act of God's free and sovereign grace, he has adopted all penitent and believing sinners into his own family. " For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." " When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." " Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God." " As many as received Christ, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." In these passages of Scripture we are clearly taught that Christians are God's adopted children. He is their Father, and Christ is their Brother. In consequence of their adoption, Christ calls them his brethren. " Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father, and to my God and your God." " Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in Heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Christ and all true believers constitute but one family. Jehovah is their common God and Father. United to Christ by adoption, all real Christians will share with him in the glorious inheritance which God has provided for them in heaven—" an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

7. This union with Christ includes *similitude of interests*.

Christ and believers have one and the same cause at heart. The manifestation of God's glory, and the salvation of perishing sinners, were the great objects which induced the Son of God to come down from heaven, and to take into union with himself the nature of man. These were the objects which he constantly sought during his residence on the earth. These are now the principal objects of his pursuit, while, enthroned in glory, he is

acting as the Advocate and Intercessor of his people. And these very objects are sought, with supreme solicitude, by all the humble and faithful disciples of Christ. They can not be true Christians who have not supreme regard to the glory of God; and to whom the salvation of sinners, and the interests of Christ's spiritual kingdom are not peculiarly precious. These sublime objects are exceedingly precious in the estimation of all consistent Christians. With fervent zeal, and with holy and increasing delight, they labour to advance the Redeemer's kingdom—to save guilty and perishing men—and to extend Jehovah's glory. They love to exult, and praise, and magnify the Lord their God, and to "worship at his footstool." As in heaven, among angels, and "the spirits of just men made perfect"—so among devout Christians on earth, there is joy over sinners who repent, and turn to God, and "do works meet for repentance." With "joy unspeakable and full of glory," they exult in the prosperity of Zion. Their purest and highest happiness is like the happiness of Christ. Their best friends are the friends of Christ. They have the same enemies to encounter which Christ is successfully opposing. His interests and theirs, in every important respect, are the same. And, by these interests, he and they will for ever remain inseparably united.

8. The union of believers with Christ is produced by *mutual and solemn covenant stipulations.*

It is proposed, by Christ, to sinners, in the precious invitations of the Gospel—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." "My oxen and my fatlings are killed; all things are ready; come unto the marriage." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." In these invitations we are assured that the price of our redemption is paid; that Divine Justice is satisfied; and that a door is opened for the free and full exercise of mercy to all repenting and believing sinners. Here Christ makes a kind and gracious offer of himself, and of all the blessings of heaven, to sinners of every description. He promises that all who will repent of their sins, embrace him in the arms of faith and love, and render holy obedience to the Law and the Gospel, shall receive pardon, and sanctification, and eternal life.

When sinners cordially submit to this plan of salvation—when they abandon their iniquities, and exercise "repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," they accept and confirm the offered covenant. In this covenant, thus confirmed, they are united to Christ, interested in his merits, and entitled to all the benefits of his mediation.

The union of believers with Christ, which is produced by these covenant transactions, is the basis of their title to the blessings of salvation. The

merits of Christ constitute the foundation of their acceptance with God. And they become interested in his merits by the "faith that worketh by love, purifieth the heart, and overcometh the world"—the faith by which they accept of his covenant. All true believers, therefore, are united to Christ in the covenant of grace, and are personally interested in the "exceeding great and precious promises" of the Gospel. Hence "God can be just and yet the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus."

It appears then, that the union of real Christians with Christ resembles, in some respects, the union of the branches with the vine—of the various parts of an edifice with the foundation—of the different members of the human body with the head—and of the wife with her husband : and that all real Christians are inseparably united to Christ, by the holy disposition of their hearts ; by the spirit of adoption ; by similarity of interests ; and by mutual covenant engagements.

From these considerations we are led to reflect,

1. How great is the benevolence and condescension of God, as exhibited in the plan of redemption by Jesus Christ.

Guilty and hell-deserving as we are, he offers to us the pardon of our sins, and the salvation of our souls. He proposes to us an everlasting covenant of grace : a covenant by which all penitent and believing sinners are admitted to the most endearing and honourable relation to Christ, and, through him, to the infinite Jehovah.

Should a child of infamy and wretchedness be adopted into a family of affluence and reputation, and be treated with the tenderness of an heir, all men would applaud the disinterested condescension of the benefactor. This, however, would be but a very faint representation of Jehovah's condescension, in admitting any of the human race into union with his beloved Son. In the supposed case, it would be only the condescension of one creature to another. But in the gracious act of God to believers, there is the condescension of the Infinite Creator to guilty creatures. By an act of free and sovereign grace, he condescends to receive them into his own family, to call them his children, and to treat them as heirs of his throne and kingdom. He exalts them to a covenant-union with his own Son—the King of glory—the Saviour of Israel.

2. From this subject we may be assisted in deciding the momentous question, whether we are indeed Christians.

We are not Christians unless we are inseparably united to the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we are truly united to Christ, we possess and exercise the same holy dispositions of heart, which he exhibited while dwelling among men : we have the Spirit of adoption ; we are pursuing the same interests which he sought ; we have abandoned the love and the practice of sin ; we have fled, for refuge, from the condemning sentence of Divine Law, to the hope which is set before us in the Gospel ; we have accepted of the covenant of grace, and solemnly and sincerely given away ourselves to Christ, as everlasting trophies of his redeeming love. If we are truly united to Christ, we possess and exercise that living faith in him, which includes, not only the agent of the understanding, but, also, a warm and hearty approbation of

his mediatorial character, and a full reliance on his merits for acceptance with God. If we are inseparably united to Christ, we have something of that heavenly temper of the Lamb, which he so eminently displayed while in this " vale of tears ;" we are daily imitating his zeal for the glory of his Father, his kindness and compassion towards men, his humility and meekness, his patience and resignation : And the great and glorious objects which he so zealously pursued while here below ; and to which he is still devoted in the Heaven of heavens, will ever call forth our most vigorous and persevering exertions. Carefully examine your own hearts, then, dear brethren, and rest not contented, for a single moment, until you have clear and decisive evidence, that you are united to Christ in that " everlasting covenant" which is " well-ordered in all things and sure."

3. How exceedingly important is it that Christians should walk worthy of their relation to Christ.

It is well known that the conduct of our earthly relatives produces no inconsiderable effect on our reputation. If they conduct well, we share in the honour which they justly acquire. But if their conduct be vicious and infamous, we suffer by the dishonour they bring upon themselves. And the more nearly related they are to us, the more tenderly do we feel the wound which their dishonour inflicts.

So, when as Christians we maintain a near and humble walk with God ; when we faithfully and habitually practise the holy religion which we profess ; when we exhibit, in our daily conduct and conversation, the virtues which so eminently distinguished the life of our exalted Redeemer : then we reflect honour on Christ and his cause—we adorn the doctrines of the gospel—we produce living testimony to the superlative excellence of the Christian religion. But when we contradict our profession, by unhallowed practice ; when we are luke-warm, and careless, and inattentive to the duties of practical piety ; when we yield to " covetousness, which is idolatry," and are manifestly more anxious to enjoy the riches, pleasures, and honours of this world, than to secure an inheritance among saints and angels in glory ; when our lives are unholy, irreverent, prayerless, or immoral : then Christ is deeply " wounded in the house of his friends ;" his laws are violated ; his holy religion is dishonoured ; and sinners are hardened, and plunged deeper in impenitence and unbelief.

Since, then, the visible glory of Christ, and of his cause, depends so much on the conduct of his professed friends, and since we are admitted to such intimate and honourable union with him ; surely we should exhibit the fruits of holiness in our life and conversation. We should remember that we are closely allied to a Being whose honour is infinitely sacred ; and that we have espoused the most important cause which ever called for the enterprise and exertion of intelligent creatures. For the honour of our Divine Master, then, as well as for the sake of our own precious souls, and the souls of those around us, we should live in the daily and faithful practice of every Christian duty. We should resolutely surmount every barrier in our way to glory. We should " run, with patience, the race which is set before us." We should " give all diligence to make our calling and election sure."

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before," we should "press," with holy and increasing ardour, "towards the mark for the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Finally; Let none forget, that union with the Lord Jesus Christ is of inexpressible importance to all men.

It is absolutely essential to salvation. They, who are not united to Christ, have no interest in his atonement. They are yet under the condemning sentence of the Divine Law. In a spiritual sense, they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." They are "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise; having no hope, and without God in the world." They are "dead in trespasses and sins." This is the deplorable condition of each one in this assembly who is not united to Christ. Let me, affectionately, but faithfully, warn you of your danger. While your affections centre in the pleasures of sin, the riches of this world, or the honour which cometh from man; and while you slight the honour and happiness of a covenant union with Christ, you incessantly expose yourself to the wrath of Heaven!

Christ is now offering you pardon and justification and eternal salvation. He is disclosing the terms on which reconciliation with God may be obtained. He is mercifully waiting for you to accept of those terms, and to receive his rich and sovereign grace. By his own tremendous death he has made atonement for your sins. By the agony of his cross; by his resurrection from the dead; by his ascension to glory; by all the horrors of perdition, and all the glories of Heaven, he now beseeches you to accept of his covenant, and be reconciled to God. If you accept the offered grace, and faithfully consecrate your life to his service, he will receive you to Heaven, "that where he is, there you may be also." He will crown you with "glory and honour." You shall dwell "where is fulness of joy." But if you reject Christ and his great salvation, you must, inevitably, "be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." For God is not a man that he should lie! And O, remember, too, that these benevolent interpositions of the Holy Trinity, if thus rejected, must for ever *aggravate* your ruin;—must become "*a savour of death unto death.*"

Be persuaded, then, to view, with deep concern, your guilt and danger. Forsake the hard "way of transgressors," without a moment's delay. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." "To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." To-day abandon sin and the powers of darkness: humble yourselves before God; and, by the vigorous exercise of evangelical faith, cordially receive Christ as your Prophet, Priest, and King; and thus ratify, in your own souls, that everlasting covenant which he has *sealed with blood*. So shall you be ever-blooming and ever-fruitful branches of the *Tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.* AMEN.